

COLONIES AND BACKWARD PEOPLES

BY

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Webster's dictionary gives the word 'colony' two meanings of interest to this study. *First*, 'a company of people transplanted from their mother country to a new province or country, and remaining subject to the jurisdiction of the parent state.' This meaning is in strict conformity with current English usage in constitutional law, and is supported by a citation from the Statute of Westminster which rules that the expression 'colony' shall not include a Dominion or any Province or State forming part of a Dominion. *Secondly*, 'any distant territory dependent on a ruling power'—which makes India, Burma, and Ceylon colonies of Great Britain, and is broad enough to include all dependencies of all colonial powers. Within the British Empire, then, the distinction that matters is that between 'Dominions' and 'Colonies' so that those who asked that Dominion Status for India should be made statutory in 1935 as well as those who were particular that it should not be done and saw to it that it was not done knew clearly what they were about.

India with Burma is indeed treated separately from colonies; a separate Secretary of State and the India Office stand beside the two other Secretaries of State for Dominions and for Colonies; but that is an arrangement dictated by administrative convenience, sometimes availed of also to camouflage India's real position by conferring on her formal, but empty, distinctions like original membership of the League of Nations, and representation in the war cabinet.

But who are backward peoples? I am purposely avoiding the word races. Article 22 (on Mandates) of the League of Nations covenant describes them as 'people not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.' It may occur to us that the present war has shown that no nation, not France, not Britain, not even the U.S.A., is able to stand by itself;

but let us pass this by, and turn to the League covenant. The backward peoples were to be placed under the tutelage of the more advanced nations and administered by them as Mandatories of the League on the principle that 'the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization.' This system was, however, applied only to colonies and territories taken from the defeated powers, primarily Germany and Turkey. The Mandates were of three classes, the division being based on expediency and convenience, rather than on logic or principle—(a) Communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire, sufficiently developed to be recognised provisionally as independent nations, subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory selected according to their wishes until such time as they are able to stand alone. Iraq is the leading example under this class; its mandate was terminated in 1932 and it is now an independent power in alliance with the British Empire. Recent events have shown that advice and assistance from Britain are still forthcoming and in an increasing measure under war conditions. (b) Other peoples, especially those of Central Africa, less developed, whose territory must be administered by the Mandatory who should guarantee freedom of conscience and religion, maintain public order and morals, prohibit abuses such as slave trade, arms traffic and liquor traffic, prevent the fortification of the territory and the arming of the people for other than police purposes and defence of the territory, and lastly, secure equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other members of the League. (c) Territories, notice the change from communities and peoples to territories here, such as S. W. Africa, and certain of the South Pacific Islands, which, owing to the sparseness of their population, or their small size, or their remoteness from the centres of civilization, or their geographical contiguity to the territory of the Mandatory, and other circumstances, can be best administered under the laws of the Mandatory as integral portions of its territory, subject to the safeguards above-mentioned in the interests of the indigenous population. It is difficult to see how this class of mandates differs in practice from annexation like that of Cyprus.

Such is the posture of the colonial problem as it has been shaped by the dispositions made by the victorious

powers after World War I. I do not think it necessary for our discussion to go into the history of colonization in the nineteenth century and before. The expansion of England, the scramble for the dark continent, the conquest of India and the forcing of 'concessions' from China are twice-told tales familiar to everybody. A. P. Newton's *A Hundred Years of the British Empire* (1940) is a recent and comprehensive account by a confirmed Imperialist; Leonard Barnes' *Empire Vs. Democracy* (1939) is a more critical study of the colonial question from a broader point of view.

Here is a picture of the advanced nations of Europe in their relations among themselves and to the rest of the world; it neatly portrays most of the elements we must take account of. It is from the pen of a great writer and thinker of wide experience, Madariaga. Writing just before the outbreak of the present war, he says: "Nations sign a solemn pledge to abstain from war, and get ready to resist by arms whosoever will cross the path which they have set out for themselves; government departments send spies to filch war plans from their dear friends; people keep thinking of unthinkable wars until they can think of nothing else; drink, prostitution, slavery, and war, like four black hounds, follow everywhere the white horse of the Knight of civilization; the old hag of colonization puts on a fig leaf and calls itself mandate; men are declared equal from the pulpit, but class and colour bars cut across their equality and the problem of colour haunts all thinking minds with its tantalizing difficulty; millions of socialists call themselves pacifists and dream of class-war, small nations are thought of and treated as markets; areas of the world are mapped out to trusts by a handful of obscure but powerful men; open diplomacy is wirepulled by secret finance; and the League of Nations becomes a kind of *kriegspiel* for diplomats. Chaos in minds, in material relations, in the drift of history." (*The World's Design*, pp. 7-8).

At no period of their long history did the Asiatic nations present a spectacle so fraught with moral turpitude, and so charged with danger to themselves and to the rest of the world. But then, they never attained the deadly efficiency in the technique of destruction so laboriously built up by Western nations, until Japan came forward to win unenvied distinction in beating them at

their own game. When in days long past Indians left their homes for China, or the Chinese for India, it was for the enrichment of human culture and attainment of a greater humanity, for the development of the god in man, not the unleashing of the brute in him. And when colonies were founded, the motive was furnished neither by desire for glory nor by lust of exploitation but by the natural impulse to continue and fulfil the task of civilization that had begun when the Aryan first set foot on India's sacred soil. Some thoughtful men in the West are aware of all this; but they are not as many as one having the world's well-being at heart would wish. On May 20, 1942, for instance, a writer in the *New Statesman and Nation* said: "With a longer history behind them than Mr. Churchill, the Chinese understand more than he about the relations of Asia and Europe They have never for a moment doubted, though they are too polite to say so, that they are the superiors of the white race in ability, in morality, in culture, and in all arts of civilization." These words, occurring in the midst of a forceful political argument, perhaps overstate the case; but they are true in substance, and what is true of the Chinese is true of the Indians as well.

Let us now consider the colonial problem from the standpoint of the powers, great and small, which compete for colonies. The view is sometimes expressed that colonial possessions are a *damnosa hereditas* which the powers would readily give up were it not for their sense of responsibility for the well-being of the colonials. But nowhere do the colonials seem to be convinced that they are taken proper care of, and it may be doubted if any colony would shed a tear if the white man suddenly elected to-day to lay down his self-imposed burden. And *a priori* it is not natural to expect in any people so much disinterested desire to do good to other peoples. The truth of the matter was fairly put many years ago by J. S. Mill, when he said: "The Government of a people by itself has a meaning, and a reality; but such a thing as government of one people by another, does not and cannot exist. One people may keep another as a warren or preserve for its own use, a place to make money in, a human cattle farm to be worked for the profit of its own inhabitants." This talk of concern for the well-being of the colonials is possibly not all of its cant; some pious souls may be

honestly persuaded of its truth; but they are too few or too weak to influence the course of affairs. This then is the first price of imperialism that colonial powers have to pay,—the constant entertainment of a living lie in the soul, to pretend that you are doing everything for the good of the other fellow while you know that it is your own interest, glory, or strategic advantage that eggs you on.

Burke warned Britain against 'the breakers of law in India becoming the makers of law for England.' But today Prof. Newton records with pride that but for Britain's work in India, 'the history of the last century and a half would have been very different both for Britain and India and for the world as a whole.' For an illustration we may cite his statement on the British achievement in Malaya; he says: "without the exertion of any armed force, by the application of the experience that had been learned in the native states of India, a few British officials effected a profound change." It is a far cry to this note of admiration for Machiavellism from Burke's noble outlook on human affairs! And who knows that the 'New Despotism' against which Lord Hewart raised his voice is not also, at least in part, a gift of imperialism? And is there no danger lurking in the new phenomenon of high placed military officials in India openly taking sides in the field of politics?

To turn now for a moment to the more tangible effects of colonial possessions of European nations,—none can doubt that colonies have been among the most potent causes of jealousy and strife. Here is Madariaga's balanced estimate of the place of the colonial system* in the world of today: "Impressive witness of a great past" an extensive part of the world is still under a colonial status. If greed, cruelty and contempt of man have gone to its making, courage, statesmanship and a faith in some cases deeply religious, in others sincerely humanistic, shines also over the historical origins and the economic and administrative development of the colonial system. But the system is obsolete in our days. It brings into too close a contact races with an entirely different outlook, not merely on economic affairs, but on the very essence of life. Colonial territories are fertile fields where the seed of future trouble is being sown at present. A tradition of prestige which attaches to colonies as it does to navies makes of the mere existence of the colonial system a

permanent cause of trouble and irritation amongst nations, and helps to keep the world in a state of predisposition to war" (p. 242). Hitler indeed is known to have told Mr. Neville Chamberlain at Godesberg: "There is one awkward question—the colonies. But that is not a matter for war; there will be no mobilisation about that." (Barnes, p. 15); but this is in flagrant contradiction of what he has said on other occasions; and the very fact of his mentioning colonies and war together is full of sinister significance. Germany's attitude on this matter on the eve of the war was correctly assessed by Barnes when he said: "It riles the Germans that a bunch of little one-eyed countries with few guns and no great superfluity of butter-countries like Holland, Belgium, and Portugal should own extensive colonial empires, while Germany herself has none . . . You may have colonies and not be a great power, but you cannot be a great power and not have colonies." (p. 52). But as Madariaga observes: "there is no reason whatsoever why the ex-German colonies should be returned to Germany, except that France and Great Britain should not have appropriated them" (p. 261); "for their action turned into a war of conquest what they had proclaimed to be a war for freedom and justice." (p. 263). And there was a real dilemma before the war; these colonies could not be retained by France and England without strengthening two dictators with powerful moral ammunition against "hypocritical" democracies; they could not be returned to Nazi Germany without justifying dictatorships by results (p. 261). In discussing the colonial ambitions of the have-not powers, English writers have sometimes urged that the nations of the world should not follow the past vices of British imperialism but imitate the progressive virtues of the British Commonwealth. What the commonwealth means today for the colonies including India apart from the Dominions we shall indicate presently. Apart from that, however, such an argument overlooks an essential moral consideration; mere persistence in the enjoyment of an unjust advantage entailed from a past violence, and opposition to changes in a situation which has become unjust by the mere passing of time (Madariaga, p. 97) is itself a form of obstruction as provocative as it is quiet.

On the side of the colonies, it seems to be generally true that none of them desires to continue the white con-

nection; they are struck more by the evils they have suffered than by the benefits they have received from this connection. The Germans, though they have no colonies, are not without their plan of colonial policy for the future; by this policy, coloured people will be allowed their full rights of existence in their home land; no native will be allowed to become a German citizen, and native schools will not teach any 'European' matter; no higher schools or universities will be open to them, and no nonsense about the equality of races will be taught or tolerated (Barnes, 50-51). On this programme the natives stand to gain nothing, and they are sure to lose much by the natural avenues of their progress being systematically blocked; they will be allowed 'full' rights of existence!, but mere existence is not life, and decay and disappearance will sooner or later be their destiny,—the fate of Red Indians promoted possibly by less violent means, but who knows? The colonials, however backward their condition, have no inducement to be grateful to the *herrenfolk*.

The position appears different under democratic colonial policy. The theory of trusteeship and assisting peoples to the realisation of self-government is indeed, in the abstract, an excellent theory. But very seldom has it been actually practised; and on those rare occasions the men who stood up for fairness to the native were shouted down as 'negrophile' (Newton, p. 109), 'clemency Canning' and what not. And Ripon's experience over the Ilbert Bill is one of the most significant chapters of colonial administration. Himself a confirmed believer in the physiological and emotional unity of mankind (86-87), Madariaga sees no possibility of the white and coloured races living on friendly terms in the same neighbourhood so long as current ideas prevail. He says: "Let us be quite frank about it, for we are in earnest and we must not mince words: the Anglo-Saxon, and in general the so-called Nordic races, entertain anything but equalitarian feelings towards the colonial races, and particularly the African blacks." (88). The African peoples, indeed, have suffered untold injury and neglect. At the Peace Conference in Paris, "All were agreed," said President Wilson, "to oppose the restoration of German colonies." Lloyd George adds the comment that the revelations as to the military, naval and aerial use which the Germans

intended to make of their colonies in the future were responsible for that unanimity. The fact, that the territories involved had inhabitants of their own, seems to have been quite forgotten.' (Barnes, p. 23). In the heat of the Ilbert Bill controversy, a certain "Brittanicus" (*sic*) wrote to the *Englishman*: "The only people who have any right to India are the British . . . Privileges the so-called Indians have which we do not begrudge them, and for which they ought to be grateful instead of clamouring for more and abusing the British if they do not get what they clamour for." (Wolf, *Ripon* II. p. 129). Probably there are many Englishmen today who would protest actively against such crudeness as this gem of anonymous journalism exhibits, but British Indian administration is still only too ready on all possible occasions to sacrifice India's interests to those of Britain.

The coloured people have often good reason to feel that the white man is playing with them the game of 'heads I win, tails you lose.' The administration starts oppressing the native to satisfy the demands of local whites; some other white men, the missionaries and philanthropists, or the home government, or both intercede for the native and gain him 'privileges' for which he has to be grateful. Here is an instance from Cape Colony. 'By the celebrated Fiftieth Ordinance which was promulgated in 1828 and confirmed in 1829,' solemnly records Prof. Newton, 'the competence of coloured people to purchase or possess land was confirmed, and they were allowed to move about freely, without passes or hindrance into every part of the colony.' (p. 105). Is this not philanthropy indeed? What more could the coloured people want? They could buy land in their own country, and move about without passes! Likewise, when planters overwork the coolies, underpay them, and ill-treat them in all manner of ways, the government intervenes and secures 'concessions' which are generously granted to them! No wonder, a humanist like Leonard Woolf declares all European states to be absolutely unfit to own African colonies. "It would" he says, "be absurd to deny that European civilisation, through the machinery of state and trade, has carried some considerable benefits into Africa; but the autocratic dominion of European over African has been accompanied by such horrible cruelty, exploitation, and injustice that it is difficult not to believe

that the balance of good in the world would have been and would be infinitely greater, if the European and his state had never entered Africa' (*Empire and Commerce in Africa*, p. 259, cited by Barnes, pp. 48-49).

Policy and administration have a tendency to put on a milder appearance and to be buttered occasionally with sweet words in the case of colonies inhabited by peoples of Oriental culture; it is not necessary to enter into any detailed study of French and Dutch policy in the East; and British policy in Malaya and Burma admittedly stands condemned by the results as revealed by the disastrous progress of the present war. It is no less bungling and incompetent, wooden and inelastic in India. British Indian history is full of promises made in a generous mood or under stress of necessity and then whittled down or obstructed in the fulfilment by mean second-thoughts. The condition of India in the last few weeks has been anything but reassuring. I do not propose to enter upon the task of apportioning blame for the past; for I do not think it is of much use, and more than that, we are not likely to get at the truth if we went merely by the formal public statements of the various parties. There will be agreement, however, that we seem to have reached an intrinsically untenable situation. This must set people thinking why this is so, and what is the reality behind it. When the premier of England states in unmistakable terms that India is all right because there are now more white soldiers in it than at any time, and this after the American President with great statesmanship had instructed the American soldiers in India not to get mixed up in Indian politics, and when in return for aid against Germany, Russia is required to renounce all interest in the Indian question,* there arises a natural suspicion in Chungking and Washington about the intentions of England in India. This suspicion has been publicly expressed by a prominent journalist of America, who wrote in *The Washington Post* recently (*Hindu* Oct. 2, 1942): "Competent persons who have been exploring the problem believe that the possibility of agreement is greater than British authorities in India admit or perhaps realise. In fact there are dis-

* This is an inference from the terms of clause V of the Anglo-Russian treaty of June 1942 where India is not expressly mentioned.

quieting signs that some of the latter intend to use the present opportunity to break the power of the Congress Party in the hope of retaining India on a colonial or semi-colonial basis." One wonders if Mr. Ernest Lindley had occasion to notice that a Provincial Governor said nearly as much some time ago! Another American writer, commenting on a speech of Mr. Churchill in Washington, observed: "There could have been nothing reassuring or comforting to our Asiatic Allies in the closing words of Churchill's first speech in Washington, 'The British and American peoples will for their own safety and the good of all walk together side by side in majesty, justice and peace.' An England, a United States "walking together in majesty, "can only mean to the coloured peoples a formidable White Imperialism more dangerous to them than anything even a victorious Japan can threaten." (*New Statesman*, May 30, reproduced in *Hindu*, August 17, 1942). The one hopeful sign is the renunciation of the so-called English and American rights in China on the 10th October, 1942. That some of these rights have been extinguished by Japan need not count as a detraction from the merit of the act; but the exclusion of Hong-Kong from its scope does so count, and one may doubt if it has any significance to India in the face of the new amendments to the Governments of India and Burma Acts, 1942.

I have said, I think, enough to show that colonialism breeds no good either to the colonial powers or to the colonials, that it has been an active promoter of misery and strife, and that any rational world order for the future should start by eliminating it completely. The theory of people not yet able to stand by themselves and their well-being forming a sacred trust in the hands of their betters, has turned out to be really nothing more than a less honest way of reasserting the old Greek view: 'It is meet that Hellenes should rule over barbarians.' And the so-called advanced nations have been paying also a terrible price for their competition in the domination of the world. Barnes says truly: "Had it not been for British and French imperial policy scouring the world for economic privileges at the expense of every prospect of free international cooperation, Hitlerism could hardly have arisen in Germany. Conversely, Hitlerism is unlikely to disappear so long as the British and French empires survive in their present economic and political

structure." (p. 261). This was written before the war. The course of the conflict has transferred the best part of French and Dutch colonial possessions, let us hope only for a time, into Japanese hands, together with Malaya and Burma. It is right to plan the driving out of the Japanese from their ill-gotten possessions; but there will be little enthusiasm for this cause in the minds of Asiatics if it means the mere restoration of the old order. And success in the enterprise would be, not perhaps, impossible, but very difficult of achievement without enthusiastic and total cooperation from all India.

To declare India free today, to assure Burma, Malaya, Indo-China and the East Indies of their freedom tomorrow, are obviously the first steps towards ensuring the successful and early termination of the war and the emergence of a really new world-order afterwards. If those in power on the side of the United Nations can command the sanity and the strength required for taking these initial steps, then we may hope that the peace after the war will be a real peace. The motives for conflict would have disappeared and disarmament would become practical politics. A world federation on a true democratic basis of equal opportunities for all men and all countries would become easy of establishment, and science would promote health and well-being instead of raining death and destruction. A French book on Anthropology contains the sentence 'Man indeed is god, but he is also a monkey.' Who will rule the world after the war—the god or the monkey in man? That is the question.

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Ward